Underneath and on the sidelines:

Sustaining feminist infrastructures using speculative fiction

Spideralex

The *Futurotopías feministas*[1] (Feminist Futurotopias) workshops have shown that they can offer a group what it needs at this moment in time in order for it to sustain itself. In these we shared the ways in which speculative fiction can sustain our efforts to create infrastructures, that are communal and feminist. Sometimes, they enabled a community to identify its unease and focus on what needed healing, while at other times they served to counterbalance structural violence caused by *patriarchalism* (that criminal alliance of patriarchy and capitalism); at yet others they also allowed us to take a breather together so that we can continue being watchful of possible futures; and in other cases, they were a trigger for activating ecosystems inhabited by narratives, fictional characters and calls for transformational collective action.

The following paragraphs show how some friction can exist between community/libertarian infrastructure and the feminist one. We look at how speculative fiction can help sustain feminist infrastructure and show some techniques on how speculative fiction workshops can be set up together.

Rugged Infrastructures

Infrastructure: To build a home or something that can sustain you from somewhere (unlike those offered on the market). To create communities in many places.

I'm part of a community (Calafou) where I 'build speculatively' together with many other people who I don't always choose myself, but I learn to feel with them and learn to love them. A polymorphous monster called community that always sets down roots in a territory and a landscape. To build a community one must go back to a territory where the community is made and unmade, constituted by a variety of thinking-feeling beings, crews, willingness, experiences, trajectories, subjectivities and dissonances.

Calafou is all about exploring one of these possible paths that separate dystopic cyberpunk from a futurotopia. How can we achieve it, when we have always been told that infrastructure will either kill you or enslave you? At Calafou, on occasion, we experience both.

Together, we multi-manage a *living infrastructure*. This sometimes leads to stress, frustration, fear and feelings of blame. One of the values of the community lies in how many mistakes are allowed per path. It also brings about techniques, tools, know-how and infrastructure.

Another of its values stems from how much we are allowed to dream and speculate together.

We speculatively create infrastructure with others, without always knowing how to do it. What needs to be established, systematised, documented? What should not be considered or not broached? What should be regulated and governed? What is there that has nothing to do with all this? How can we overcome the stress caused by the processes of establishing this and still allow the infrastructure to be fluid, lightweight and adaptable as well?

Sometimes I'd like to be *Binti*[2] *the harmonizer*, collaborating so that the energies of the entities that make up the community can converge, resolve and transform together. To know how to do it with all the species found in the territory, to activate that interface. I feel them near and far; distancing the sensitive remains and interferes with our projections of possible community infrastructures.

Infrastructures that are as technical as they are technological. If there is something that differentiates them, it is something relative, blurred, changing. Community communication networks, communities that keep and strengthen knowledge, infrastructures that sustain diverse communities. We are talking about infrastructures that focus on what we believe are basic necessities, such as: electricity, water, poo, piss, connectivity, compost, sewage, organic/electronic/industrial waste, housing, the production of

material and immaterial things; and sometimes food and drink is also processed.

It is a basic kind of infrastructure that sustains and consumes you because that kind of infrastructure does not always free you, nor does it free your time and energy. I'm not sure how you build infrastructures in a community so that they sustain us yet are also sustainable from an energetic and emotional perspective. Perhaps a feminist infrastructure can offer us additional paths to explore.

feminist infrastructures

By *feminist infrastructures* we mean feminist struggles – everything that is sustained and shored up by more or less stable resources – so they can develop and move forward. By *resources* we mean techniques, technologies and processes (analogue, digital, social) including safe spaces, shelters, libraries, trustworthy sisterhood networks, servers, yellow pages, repositories, bots, documentation and memory tools, encyclopaedias, HerStories, techniques for life, spells, rituals and exorcisms. They also include the mobile, ephemeral and transitional that can be found in the temporary infrastructure of meetings, workshops and parties that nurture the trust, affection and well-being of our fellow feminists.

We believe that the feminist infrastructure, which is found *underneath and on the sidelines*, is often precarious and sometimes difficult to see. But it is widespread and disseminated, and at its core is the value and affection that the people, machines and ecosystems that constitute it offer each other.

Our perspectives and terms of access – and how we use and develop technologies – are deeply influenced by the way patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism are embedded in our daily lives and in the societies in which we live. We therefore need to develop new methodologies to identify the processes that are creating feminist infrastructures and the way these point to liberating techniques and technologies designed from and for life.

The creation of feminist infrastructure aims to give us answers and value. Thinking about the diversity of our contributions and actions allows us to open up new horizons of political action as well as restorative processes, and to shape other possibilities for all of us.

Perhaps feminist infrastructures also offer the capacity to sustain themselves by working together on the fear and shame imposed by the *patriarchal* system. Feminist infrastructure is similar to the community infrastructure outlined above, but it comes from other places and has other motivations.

Women and fellow feminists have always been there, underneath and on the sidelines, sharing *techniques for life* and making *ap-*

propriate technologies (rooted in an idiosyncrasy that neither contaminates nor remains), ‘slow’ technologies, age-old technologies, ‘minor technologies’, and free technologies in pursuit of the sovereignty and autonomy of the communities that develop them. As Margarita Padilla reminds us, we have been the bearers and guarantors ensuring that the knowledge regarding this diversity of techniques was shared and evolved within communities because: *“All technology is developed in community. These communities can be more or less autonomous, or more or less controlled by corporations. The struggle for sovereignty is about communities. Nobody invents, builds or codes alone, quite simply because the task is such that it would be impossible”.*[3]

Techniques for Life
<> Appropriate Techniques

But what is it that draws a sensitive line between techniques and technologies, and why is this important for feminist infrastructures? According to Biagini and Carnino, technique is *“both knowledge and tools, in other words, a set of informal processes and their instrumental sedimentation in the objects produced by artisans*[4] *[...] Technology is a set of macro-technical processes (in other words, pro-*

cesses that are bigger than human beings and the community of a hamlet) that are made possible thanks to the coming together of science and technology".[5]

Technique is not necessarily technology, but technology is made by absorbing techniques. In systemisation induced by the production of technologies, techniques for life are often completely omitted and destroyed: Those which offered us other ways of understanding our relationship with our surroundings and the values we convey in that relationship.

Biagini and Carnino offer us another crucial element to think about critically when they say: *"According to Wigney, the ancient world continued to produce relative facts instead of absolute facts because it was based on knowledge that was essentially situated ~~established~~ and difficult to transfer to other places. Industrialisation and its corollary, proletarianisation defined as the rebuffing of artisans, was only possible on a massive scale because of the science that was being developed. This science, far from being speculative, was deeply rooted in the reality of 'it is a fact'".*[6]

In this shift, we can once again feel the potential of speculative fiction for recovering those techniques for life and seeing how they take us towards technologies that are appropriate for our communities. In the established and the speculative we find a way to release ourselves from the myth of science and technological progress. This technology is, first and foremost,

defined as a policy of consumed facts (move fast and break things). Very few take part in dreaming it, designing it, deciding it, but we are all exposed to the effects of its application. It leaves no room for a speculative collective design of the techniques and technologies that we need and deserve. Modern science and 'new' technologies are based on distancing, destroying or absorbing techniques necessary for life, and they stop us from finding the access, shortcuts and paths to our appropriate technologies.

According to Elleflâne, an *"adequate technology and also appropriate, copied, obtained. [...] describes those technologies best suited to the environmental, cultural and economic context; requiring few resources; implying the least costs; with a low environmental impact; low levels of maintenance; created using local skills, tools and materials; and that can be locally repaired, modified and transformed. At the end of the day, which community does not need technology to be efficient, understandable and adapted to its own environmental, cultural and economic context?"*.[7]
It is in this mutual understanding and consent among communities and their appropriate technologies that the keys to feminist infrastructures that sustain regenerative ecosystems can be found. As if based on processes of autopoiesis, they are nourished by our ideas, memories, narratives, stories, fabulations and desires.

NEW VOCABULARIES TO CREATE WORLDS

What has no name cannot exist, and so we extend an invitation for the creation of new vocabularies and techniques to explore these futurotopias and feminist infrastructures. For example, we could talk to each other using these ideas to shape them:

Ecotechnology (*Toward an Ecological Society*, Murray Bookchin): *"An eco-community would be supported by a new kind of technology – or ecotechnology – one composed of flexible, versatile machinery whose productive applications would emphasize durability and quality, not built-in obsolescence, and insensate quantitative output of shoddy goods, and a rapid circulation of expendable commodities".*

Eco-economy (*Mars Trilogy*, Stanley Robinson): How can we create – on this and other planets – an economy at whose core is an ecology based on geological and inter-species solidarity?

Pooship (*Ecosec*): To become an expert in managing our shit, in the literal and figurative sense, along the whole chain involved in expelling it, collecting it, taking it away and composting it. To redignify it as a sign of luck and fertiliser for the earth/soil.

Para-paradise (*Tatiana, THF Editorial*): A paradise looked after by ex-paramilitaries who have become tour guides and the guardians of woods and rivers, or a paradise located in a parallel/alternative dimension that is very close by but which you don't know how to enter.

Narcofeminism (*Metzineres*): A practical theory based on what took place and was talked about in the sessions run by women drug users, who, via feminism and solidarity, and empowering themselves together to combat systemic gender-based violence, are building a different relationship with a consumption habit. Making use of 'soft', chemical and relational technologies.

Futurotopia (*B01*): Acquiring future – as well as our own – utopias, highlighting the possibility of jointly thinking of the futures towards which we want to go together, making them possible by being able to think about them and tell other people about them. To work together on the manipulation of space-time, we also suggest some techniques outlined by Black Quantum Futurism[8]:

Vision of the future: this mode of practice increases the 'knowability' of the future by allowing it to be seen with more visual clarity than usual. It involves little or no deviation from the future, just greater precision when visualising it.

Future alteration: this mode of practice involves a slight deviation from present reality and uses what is already available and

what is statistically probable to choose the future of a small subset of probable futures.

Future manifestation: this mode of practice involves the highest degree of creativity and allows the practitioner to build the future step by step, piece by piece.

To this we add the creation of our own self-fulfilling prophecies *"a prediction which, once made, is in itself the cause of it becoming a reality".*

Lastly, we list other possible techniques[9] that we have found in our speculative fictions: visioning, recounting our dreams and nightmares, relating our memories, meditating, daydreaming, branching out, creating memories of the future, rescuing and exorcising unwritten pasts, writing down what is missing, suturing cracks, travelling through our bodies, creating restorative processes, healing traumas, limiting imposed narratives, automatic writing.

thinking our infrastructures based on stress points

Community infrastructure and feminist infrastructure share common points as well as some of the stresses that affect them.

We believe that both are based on processes or doing things in a speculative way. Both can also quickly explode, burst and disappear.

They involve techniques for life that allow the systemisation/establishment of certain processes that exist in ecosystems and which need to be documented, communicated and disseminated to keep them alive.

They tend to systematise/consolidate certain processes, absorbing techniques for life and sometimes use them to make appropriate technologies.

They direct certain needs/actions towards a number of resources designed to cover/answer them, bringing about various effects that we are, as yet, unable to track/read.

An infrastructure tends to (re)generate and (a)cumulate, and the alchemy that results from this stress must be periodically re-examined in order to drain or water/nourish it in time.

Stable infrastructures, or those in a beta stage, allow us to closely explore a paradoxical stress somewhere between 'gaining' autonomy and not 'losing' independence.

So, in themselves, they are open questions about how we can either continue with them – or live without them – and to what degree (or in what ways) we can make this possible together.

1 - https://zoiahorn.anarchaserver.org/specfic/

2 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nnedi_Okorafor

3 - Margarita Padilla, Soberanía Tecnológica, Volumen 2, 2018, Available at: https://www.ritimo.org/IMG/pdf/sobtech2-es-with-covers-web-150dpi-2018-01-13-v2.pdf

4 - Language is also a technology, often binary, and on this occasion, I decided to debinarise artisans.

5 - ‘We often stop progress’ Cedric Biagini and Guillaume Carnino, in Les luddites en France: Résistances a l'industrialisation et a l'informatisation Pub. L’échapée, 2010

6 - ibid

7 - De las tecnologías apropiadas a las Tecnologías Re-Apropiadas, by Elleflâne, Soberanía Tecnológica, Volumen 2, 2018, Available at: https://www.ritimo.org/IMG/pdf/sobtech2-es-with-covers-web-150dpi-2018-01-13-v2.pdf

8 - https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/

9 - https://zoiahorn.anarchaserver.org/specfic/2020/02/11/iterations/